

Energy in the Early Modern Home
The Material Culture of Heating, Lighting and Cooking

Edited volume
Call for chapters

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Abstract

Energy, needless to say, is one of the most pressing challenges in society today. In the heavily debated topic of energy transitions, the blame is often sought in heavy industrial production and consumption of fossil fuels. At the same time, the demand for energy by private consumers in western countries is ever growing which is often associated with high-lifestyle consumption. More often than ever before, the development of consumer society and rising energy use are considered as interlinked processes. Despite the importance of a long-term historical perspective on the topic, much of the scholarly debate on past, present and future energy transitions and their interaction with lifestyles are hardly grounded in a long-term historical perspective. At the same time, most of the vast historiography on material culture, from the material renaissance to the consumer and industrious revolutions that ignited the birth of a consumer society in early modern Europe, have largely neglected environmental issues. A window into the complex relation between energy transitions, consumer behaviour, and material culture, this book aims to search for new insights into the role of energy in the early modern home. It will be the first volume to scrutinise the early modern developments in energy consumption within its social and cultural contexts as manifested in domestic material cultures. Ultimately, the goal is to get a better understanding of the causes and effects of energy transitions – or the lack thereof – in early modern Europe seen from a household perspective. As such, it will address a very important international debate: the role played by households in fostering the energy transitions of the early modern period. It welcomes several experts in the field to tackle the relation between energy, consumption, and material culture, following a wide range of approaches and adopting a long-term and comparative perspective. While most historians will argue that energy transitions were largely the result of changes in supply, prices, technology, etc., we will claim that energy regimes in the past (and in the present) were (and are) much more rooted in the domestic practices and mentalities of daily life.

Theme

Over the past decades, energy has certainly not been neglected by economic historians working on the industrial revolution (e.g. Wrigley 2016). More recently, historians have discussed how the major technological breakthroughs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also brought forward a process of ‘domestic industrialisation’ in terms of artificial heating and lighting that dramatically expanded the material world of energy within the household economy (Nye 2001,

Adams 2014, Gooday 2016). However, the effects of energy transitions on households and their material culture *prior to* the industrial revolution remain much less clear. Nevertheless, as enlightened inventors like Benjamin Franklin and Count Rumford were thinking about how to improve domestic comfort through more efficient hearth and stove types, the transition to fossil fuels and the popularisation of new fuel technologies are believed to have drastically impacted the organisation of the household. Moreover, changing consumer demand for new ways of heating, lighting and cooking could have been an autonomous force in shaping early modern energy regimes as well. Indeed, from the extensive literature on early modern material culture and the inventions of such concepts as comfort, convenience and cleanliness, one does certainly not get the impression that the domestic lifestyle of the early modern European consumer was oriented towards an energy-saving lifestyle. On the other hand, the reverse could also have been true. Many of the changes in energy supply had to be negotiated with daily practices and customs and other domestic values that had a path-dependent effect on the adoption of new technologies.

Because of their seemingly trivial nature, material cultures of heating, lighting and cooking have long been neglected by consumption historians. Their apparent *histoire immobile* belies, however, the fundamental but more subtle processes that happened within this part of material and domestic culture. Daniel Roche (1997) has already described how the struggle against cold and darkness shaped the organisation of the early modern domestic interior and how new ways of heating and lighting changed how people looked at the home fire. Yet, the consumption and material culture of energy remains largely unexplored, since in the classic historiography on early modern consumption and material culture energy has mostly been overshadowed by a (semi-) luxury world of goods craving for novelty, fashion and pleasure. According to Sara Pennell, however, the exponential increase in domestic coal use was ‘perhaps the greatest transformation in the consumption practices of British households across the seventeenth century’ (2016, 62). As research on the electrification of America since the late nineteenth century has shown, social and cultural changes within the domestic practices related to energy consumption could be powerful determinants of both energy technology and supply. Did, for instance, the growing importance of domestic sociability surrounding the drinking of tea and coffee stimulate the increase in portable heating elements such as braziers? And was, more generally, the emergence of an urban lifestyle focused on domesticity and comfort a causal factor in the early modern energy transition to fossil fuels? According to John E. Crowley (2001), the consumer revolution in early modern Britain especially concerned a greater sensibility within the material culture of heating and lighting. Perhaps such a consumerist mentality ultimately triggered the emergence of an (early) modern energy-intensive lifestyle.

Format and timeline

This edited volume seeks to appeal to historians and students of both the 'consumer revolution' and 'energy revolution', two important historiographies with a long academic tradition that have hitherto been highly isolated from one another. It is a great opportunity, we believe, to provide a forum to a group of excellent researchers to work together on a challenging, innovative and

important international debate. We are aiming at a volume consisting out of 10-14 chapters, each of which will count c. 8,000 words. Chapters can come in more essay-like papers as well as case studies, tackling the broader relationship between energy transitions, consumer behaviour and material culture in the early modern period. None of the chapters will come from previously published material.

Contributions will stem from a workshop organised at the University of Antwerp on 19 and 20 September 2019, but other papers are very much welcomed as well. If you are interested to contribute to this book project, we would like to receive a title and abstract of c. 500 words before 20 December 2019. Ultimately, we hope to deliver an edited volume at a respected publisher with selected contributions. Full papers are expected by 1 June 2020.

Many thanks for your consideration,

The editors

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